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ABSTRACT

General satisfaction with the achievements of an introductory writing-across-the-discipline program led faculty of Saint Mary's College (Indiana) to believe students were capable of sustaining comparable progress in their majors. Subsequently, the faculty spent between three and four years working out procedures for a new advanced writing requirement for graduation. Because portfolios had proved successful in introductory writing courses, teachers of majors' courses decided to use a similar collection and review process for advanced writing. The faculty of each department developed their own criteria for advanced writing, with only general models and advice from writing program directors. The summer before beginning gradual implementation, responses to a questionnaire revealed that a number of faculty expected that advanced writing would not affect the major, a "denial" response which indicated they were unwilling or unable to conceptualize integrating writing assignments and content. During the second year both faculty and student frustration with the new requirement reached its height--the "conflagration" stage had set in. Many faculty were overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy and despair. The most common objection was the complaint that teaching writing took too much time and the results were not worth it. Finally, in its third year, the requirement began to develop "ego strength," arising in large part from thorough groundwork and from trust and responsibility. Portfolio reviews became more pleasurable than painful, in many cases occasions of pride for both teacher and student. By graduation in 1992 there was a pervasive sense among faculty that student writing had improved substantially during the previous three years and that this improvement was a direct result of the advanced writing requirement. (NH)

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of an Advanced Writing Requirement

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Denial, Conflagration, Pride:
Three Stages in the Development
of an Advanced Writing Requirement

The following narrative describes the long road to a successful advanced writing requirement taught entirely by the full-time faculty of a small liberal arts college. The authors hope that their story will suggest short cuts for other writing teachers and administrators, and that the illustration of how all can end well will encourage others on the journey.

Background and Context

The Saint Mary's College writing-across-the-disciplines program is entering its twenty–first year; thus it has managed to survive for a generation. Thanks in part to circumstances such as size and a faculty dedicated to teaching--1700 students, small classes and a 11/1 student faculty ratio--over two-thirds of the faculty have become involved through the years with teaching writing to students at every level. In 1987 the U.S. News & World Report survey described the college's writing program as one of its distinctive assets.

During a curricular review in 1983, faculty at the college, with few dissenting opinions, decided to integrate an ambitious advanced writing requirement (advanced W), taught entirely by full-time faculty, into all twenty-one majors at the college. General satisfaction with the achievements of the introductory level W in content courses led faculty to believe that students were capable of sustaining comparable progress in their majors. Thus faculty instituted a curricular revision, having agreed only on the idealistic goal of involving all possible majors' courses and every teacher at the college in teaching writing.

With the aid of a three-year development grant from the Lilly Foundation, faculty in each department set out to articulate specific writing goals for graduating seniors: they asked what writing chemists and sociologists are asked to do; what writing tasks are handed to a new employee at IBM; what

expectations graduate schools have in terms of writing skills. After considerable discussion and compromise, faculty specified the kinds of assignments their majors were to collect in a portfolio and detailed logistics for submitting and evaluating these papers.

In introductory-level writing courses across the curriculum, faculty had been working for ten years with college-wide evaluation of portfolios and were generally pleased with the results. Evaluation had become more consistent over the years; even more important, portfolio review served as a brief and comprehensive in-service training session for both new and experienced writing teachers. In the first few years after it was instituted, portfolio review was an occasion for reassuring writing teachers that they had done the best they could with students who did not receive W certification in their content W course. Over the last few years, the review had become an opportunity for faculty to display students' progress with pride and to receive compliments from their colleagues on the general success of a set of portfolios.

Because portfolios had proved so successful in introductory W courses, teachers of majors' courses decided to use a similar collection and review process for the advanced W. The hope was that the prospect of a portfolio would enlarge the students' sense of audience beyond their individual teachers and simultaneously engage teachers in deliberation about writing pedagogy, encouraging a developmental progression of assignments and courses through the major. At the outset most faculty members conceded the theoretical need to compromise and reach consensus on standards if they expected to evaluate portfolios fairly.

Although some members of the writing program steering committee argued for college-wide standards, in the end department faculty developed criteria for the advanced W on their own, with only general models and advice from writing program directors. A long tradition of autonomous departments at the college made any other process unrealistic. In addition, writing program history suggested that because it had been allowed to develop organically and idiosyncratically within departments, the introductory W was imaginative in ways no outside organizer could have anticipated. The directors of

the writing program (one each from the disciplines of biology, English, humanistic studies, philosophy, and psychology) also believed that faculty who articulated their own goals and developed their own methods were more likely to improve and promote the program in the future.

Because any new requirement for graduation can apply only to incoming freshman, departments had between three and four years to work out procedures on paper and to experiment with the most challenging components of the new requirement. Faculty spent the first year formulating advanced W proposals, and the next four semesters in succession developing assignments, responding to drafts, working through revisions, and evaluating sample portfolios. National writing consultants and successful teachers from the college offered as much advice as teachers were able to absorb. Nothing seemed too difficult during those exploratory years; at times enthusiasm even ran high. After all, most discussions were hypothetical and the samples rarely involved messy papers and threatened students.

The First Stage: Denial

In August of 1989, the summer before beginning the gradual implementation of departmental advanced W proposals, the co-directors of the program sent out a questionnaire asking faculty how they expected the new requirement to change their major. Surprisingly, every respondent but one anticipated little or no effect. In some respects this optimism was a good sign. Confident that they were already doing all they could to teach writing, departments expected little change.

In other respects this expectation that the advanced W would not affect the major signaled that a number of faculty were either unwilling to take the new requirement seriously or unable to conceptualize additional possibilities for integrating writing assignments and content. Two departments simply changed labels, making their senior comprehensives equivalent to the advanced W requirement. Numerous faculty declared writing irrelevant or impossible to include in their syllabuses. In one large department where few instructors were writers, faculty no doubt realized full well that taking writing seriously would have a huge impact on their major. Rather than make a commitment in that direction, however, they agreed to see how other departments dealt with the new requirement before taking

portfolio collection and review seriously. In a side-step that avoided the whole evaluation procedure, their majors were simply required to file three "B" papers with the department secretary.

The best indication that faculty did not yet see writing and learning as integrally related was the fact that no department deleted or recombined content and writing assignments in order to compensate for the added work required to complete a portfolio. Cutting content, regardless of the reason, was regarded as a savage and unnecessary operation by the vast majority of faculty. Instead, virtually every department moved in the opposite direction, using the advanced W as an "add-on" to their major curriculum. One department, for example, specified that the third required paper in the portfolio had to be the research paper which some faculty members had always yearned to include somewhere in the major. But nowhere did the department add instruction in research methods or step-by-step assistance with completing such a complex intellectual task. Another department detailed five challenging assignments for the portfolio; however, only two of those five assignments were built into major courses. The advanced W in these instances was manipulated into a "wish list" or a directed reading, without credit for either students or faculty members.

Not only did many departments increase previous writing requirements, but in virtually every major an additional substantial burden was added to students' loads by the expectation that they complete revisions on their portfolio submissions outside of class--often as long as a year after completing the course in which the paper was submitted. Thus students were simultaneously writing new papers and revising old ones, to an exacting standard in many cases.

The writing program coordinators, worried about the directions things were taking, attempted to respond to escalating student and faculty complaints and emphasized the integration of drafts into faculty syllabuses. But discontent among both students and faculty was growing.

The Second Stage: Conflagration

During the second year of the advanced W both faculty and student frustration with the new requirement reached its height. Faculty who were comfortable and confident teachers of content

suddenly found themselves to be halting and questioning teachers of writing. "I made so many mistakes," the humble groaned, "How can my students write about art or Aristophanes when they can't connect a subject with a verb?" the frustrated complained. As majors faced the challenge of writing about increasingly difficult subject mater, their writing often seemed to deteriorate rather than improve.

The general approach of simply adding on writing topics to an already unwieldy curriculum insured that early experiences with the advanced W would be quick and clear disasters. The number of new assignments probably also hastened the bitter news the advanced W was destined to place squarely in front of faculty noses: students were not being taught to write nearly as well in their major classes as had been assumed. Prior to the advanced W the picture had not looked nearly so bleak to faculty who never or rarely assigned writing or who dealt with only a paper or two in each class--in batches of twenty to thirty, always with the major focus on content. Forced by advanced W submissions to take a comprehensive and focused view of the writing weaknesses among each department's majors, faculty were overwhelmed, despairing, and anger. Especially threatening to individual faculty members was the fact that papers originally submitted in their own classes were often found unsatisfactory when reevaluated within a portfolio to meet the advanced W requirement.

The implications of this new accumulation of information were disturbing. Students had been graduating regularly with poor to mediocre writing skills, which faculty had successfully ignored. More devastating still, students had been preparing papers their teachers would not objectively evaluate as satisfactory, but these same teachers had not stopped covering material long enough to help students develop the writing skills necessary to complete their papers satisfactorily. With such a clear profile of the lack of writing skills in virtually all disciplines, faculty were forced into a difficult choice: would they deny or ignore what the students were not learning, or would they organize to help them?

Not surprisingly, many teachers at the college developed a line of defensive and blame-laying behaviors, too personal and distracting to chronicle here. More challenging to explore is why, in department after department, perceptions of what students in general were accomplishing were so out of

sync with what individual students had actually been producing all along. Why were so many faculty overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy and despair the first year of the advanced W requirement?

There were good reasons why teachers, particularly those in business, the sciences and social sciences, felt frustrated and overwhelmed in their first attempts to teach and evaluate writing along with content material in major courses. Their own educational backgrounds had rarely prepared them to be writing teachers; even among humanists few had had the experience of handling a class full of flawed first drafts. Unaccustomed to seeing beyond mistakes of every variety to a paper's potential, new writing teachers often felt powerless to meet the enormously varied needs in a class of twenty-five individuals. Few colleagues in any discipline could recall writing drafts or revising papers during their own undergraduate years. Most college teachers learned to revise for a master's thesis or dissertation, when they knew quite a lot about the material and were highly motivated to perform well. There was a world of difference, therefore, between what many teachers expected from a draft and what undergraduates were capable of generating. There was a world of difference, too, between faculty members' current writing context and that of their students. Most teachers worked so long on a few pages of prose that they scarcely remembered the mess of their first attempts. They also typically produced far fewer words over several years than some students were asked to produce in one semester. As a result, novice writing teachers tended to expect entirely too much of their students initially and then to become discouraged and even bitter early in the writing process.

While most teachers outside the humanities recalled any number of excellent content teachers, many remembered only poor writing teaching in their disciplines. Faculty in the social and natural sciences did not learn good methods for helping students become autonomous writers in graduate school. In order to do research in someone else's laboratory, like many other graduate students, they typically had to agree to work on a mentor's project or on an individual project that dove-tailed nicely with ongoing work. When the time came to write up results, they had little input or recognition. Unfortunately, this model did not work well in their own teaching of undergraduates; it led them to be

too directive of their students" compositions.

Another reason some non-humanities faculty had difficulty adjusting to teaching writing was that for years they had relied on tests to validate students' learning. Ordinarily class performances on objective tests approximated a bell-shaped curve: a high percentage of Bs, some As and Cs and only a small number of Ds. Faculty even saw students' occasional failures as expected and let them drop one quiz grade. If a test failed to produce a satisfactory bell shape, the teacher re-designed the test and/or teaching methods until things came out as they should. In this context faculty rested easy that the occasional impersonal failure fit into a pattern of how humans learn.

When faculty accustomed to such predictable results began to make formal writing assignments in their major classes, their ease with themselves as teachers was suddenly challenged. On a first advanced W assignment, for example, the novice writing teacher typically faced a whole class of "rewrites," a whole set of results at the lower end of the curve. As yet unable to anticipate students' slow progress through revision, these novices were likely to become discouraged and interpret their students' "failures" as their own. Faculty who made the mistake of giving grades on these early drafts were besieged by distraught students who also, precipitously, perceived themselves as having failed.

The whole matter of grading further exacerbated the discomfort of novice writing teachers. Those who were accustomed to more objective and clear-cut measures were often uncomfortable with the inevitably subjective and emotionally sensitive components of grading writing, regardless of how hard they tried to objectify the product with explicit directions and numerical evaluation. Nor was the matter as simple for the inexperienced writing teacher as recording the grades, handing back the papers, and moving on to new material. Teaching writing well requires teachers to help students make something out of those messy beginnings both might much rather forget. Grades on papers are thus necessarily delayed longer than on tests, and both teachers and students often found this new delay in closure anxiety-provoking.

If individual faculty members were this dissatisfied with themselves as writing teachers, it is not

difficult to imagine the level of frustration when whole departments of unhappy individuals met behind closed doors to thrash out their standards of evaluation. Before the new advanced W requirement, faculty were fully aware of the differences in standards within departments, but as often as possible, they tried to ignore rather than resolve these differences, no doubt having concluded long ago that it was good for students to negotiate a variety of well-informed if idiosyncratic preferences. Such individualism went unquestioned when there was no audience for writing beyond the classroom teacher, but it wreaked havoc on portfolio readings. In the end students suffered.

During the first and second year of advanced portfolio review, conflicting faculty criteria got in the way of a more appropriate focus on learning to teach writing. Faculty often found themselves split between those who believed that undergraduates should be writing for a general audience and those who wanted students rigorously trained in professional writing. If a student's personal narrative was submitted to a faculty member who assigned only research papers, the ensuing suggestions for revision often left the student confused and angry. On occasion when students' literature reviews or technical research reports were submitted to faculty members fresh out of graduate school, the demands for stylistic correctness left students wondering what the criteria for publication in a professional journal had to do with them.

Faculty within the same department also disagreed frequently and vehemently about when work on a portfolio submission was complete. Many evaluators took to heart--with a vengeance--the dictum that writing is revision. In the first year of portfolio submission, paper after paper was returned to student after student with extensive suggestions for revision. It did not matter how many semesters earlier the paper had been written, if the faculty advisor was no longer on the continent, if papers written later in the major did not show any of the same weaknesses. Indeed, students were often so distracted by extensive revisions on faintly-remembered past efforts that their focus was splintered from the class work at hand. As many teachers complained, all majors' courses had been changed to incompletes.

Although disputes over standards within departments were fully expected, other departmental decisions came as more of a surprise--the choice, for example, by several departments during the first and second year of the advanced W to read the entire portfolios of graduating seniors in March or April. It was, of course, impossible at that point to have a serious evaluation because it was not humane either to make substantial demands for revision or to deny graduation to a senior at the end of second semester. More problematic still, students were given virtually no chance to learn from their mistakes, much less bask in success. If they received a poor portfolio review just prior to graduation students felt insulted; those who received praise felt unfulfilled, given the hastiness of those ninth-hour assessments.

Students rapidly became aware of the roles faculty played in portfolio evaluations-- nonchalant or highly critical. Neither dismissive comments about the value of the advanced W nor unreasonable demands for perfection helped faculty respect one another's handling of the new requirement. Many teachers were embarrassed and angry to see so much soiled linen waving in front of students.

Put in the most pragmatic terms, the aim of portfolio review was to use social pressure to bring about better teaching of writing. In the early months of the process, however, many teachers had anything but such collaborative, collegial feelings. In fact, both novice and experienced teachers of writing described feeling exposed and threatened when their students' papers fell into the hands of their colleagues. Before the advanced W, both well and poorly designed assignments had remained private. Portfolio review, however, brought all writing teachers into the marketplace and exposed their wares for inspection by critical eyes. The possibilities for developing open pedagogical exchanges remained attractive; however, the discomfort caused by such a public teaching forum, especially for those long accustomed to privacy, presented a major hurdle.

Finally, the most common objection of all--among even a dedicated and enlightened faculty--was the complaint that teaching writing took too much time and that the results were not worth the agony. Dutiful faculty were almost swept away by waves of revisions, from courses present and past. Anguished reports from students made it sound as if teachers had incorporated dozens of writing topics,

scores of drafts and revisions into the curriculum, far too many for anyone on either side of the desk to handle. On bad days such objections appeared to be irrefutable. By the spring of 1991, the second year of the graduation requirement, the advanced W seemed not such a good idea at all.

In the midst of so much doubt over whether the new addition to the curriculum was helping students learn better or eroding morale across the campus, a few outspoken opponents of the requirement called a meeting of departmental chairs and proposed the elimination of the advanced W as a graduation requirement, effective immediately. Attending the meeting, however, were also defenders of the requirement who blocked its precipitous elimination from the curriculum. After two years faculty seemed to be polarized on the subject of the advanced writing requirement. Caught in the thick of the dispute, writing program directors wondered whether continuing such a controversial requirement would do more harm than good.

The Third Stage: Taking Pride in Major Accomplishments

Fortunately, as a psychologist put it, the advanced W passed as rapidly though its "ID" stage of development ("This job is way too hard, I quit") as it had through its "Superego" stage ("Nothing to it: we teach them to write, they learn"). In its third year the requirement began to have something akin to Ego strength ("No one is going to do this job for us. We might as well buckle down and do it right"). By graduation in the spring 1992 there was a pervasive sense among faculty that student writing had improved substantially during the previous three years and that this improvement was the direct result of the advanced W requirement. Portfolio reviews had become more pleasurable than painful, in many cases occasions of pride for both teacher and student.

It took the majority of a dedicated and intelligent faculty somewhat less than three years to retrain themselves as effective writing teachers and to set up procedures and guidelines to help students develop good portfolios. This remarkable turnabout occurred at least in part because the demolition proved more difficult than anticipated: the annoying writing program refused to take its cue and gracefully exit. The real cause of such a major shift in attitude, however, came from more positive sources: from

thorough groundwork and from trust and responsibility.

Part of its support system during this period of stress was the writing program's diverse leadership. During the early years of the introductory W, the program was directed by members of the English Department. With the movement toward the advanced W, faculty from psychology, philosophy, biology and humanistic studies moved gradually into positions as co-chairs. Currently four faculty direct the program each year for the compensation of a one-course reduction each. This organization has, the directors of the program suspect, been a fortunate choice. There is no ONE writing person, no one-dimensional fanatic from the English Department, no outside agitator bringing in new-fangled ideas that mean a lot of extra work for everyone. Leadership that wears many hats, that permeates many departments and committees does not provide an easy target for anger and abuse.

From the outset of the advanced writing requirement each department had been responsible for establishing criteria for portfolio collection and review. Thus it was common knowledge, regardless of all projection and blame slinging, who was responsible when difficulties arose. Just as departments had been trusted to formulate their original criteria, they were also trusted to work out the glitches in their early drafts. These colleagues were after all, as the dean of faculty reminded them in a pre-school writing workshop that third year, faculty in a small liberal arts college who had the responsibility to write themselves and to teach their students that skill as best they could. Many were also survivors of the violent opposition in the late seventies to the basic writing-across-the-disciplines requirement; they knew from history that such conflicts, with luck and common sense, could be productive.

In addition to offering encouragement and trying to build confidence among novice writing teachers, writing program directors scrambled to find help for a faculty in search of good teaching techniques. The best sources of successful methods proved to be from colleagues who were further along in the struggle than others. Many faculty gained credibility among their colleagues when they published papers on methods for teaching writing in major courses. The writing program sponsored numerous workshops where successful and published writing teachers addressed faculty complaints and questions,

both directly and indirectly. Prior to each workshop writing program directors worked with speakers through several drafts of their presentations to insure the pertinence and quality of their remarks.

Carefully chosen from across all disciplines, workshop presenters made the most persuasive case possible for the feasibility and desirability of the advanced W. Several faculty described how they struck a balance between their students' need to learn to write and their need to master content. They were most successful with assignments, these teachers reported, when they placed themselves and the discipline in the background and the student's interest and ability to communicate in the foreground. The authors of articles on teaching writing in education (Bryant, Traxler & Watson, 1993), math (Snow, 1989), and nursing (Danford, 1990) described assignments that were developmentally and professionally appropriate for undergraduates. As a result of the sound advice offered in these workshops, faculty began to gauge the quality of their assignments by whether the majority of their classes produced drafts with potential and revisions that showed progress.

A positive surprise for the directors of the program was the eagerness with which many teachers in the professional disciplines accepted the challenge of integrating instruction in writing with content material. An economics professor offered a workshop, for example, based on an article he had published (McElroy, 1990), in which he described how he had experimented with writing a paper himself along with his students over the course of a senior seminar. Instead of beginning with a draft of the entire paper, both professor and students wrote the first part of their papers, the introduction, and completed that section before they moved on to the second component, the research review, and so on, until all more or less simultaneously reached the data analyses and conclusions of their papers.

Two other faculty described the method they had published on sequencing assignments (Stoddart and Loux, 1992) that asked students to begin with a narrative and gradually add research findings to support their arguments or to begin with one angle of a comparison, such as an analysis of a typical product of the educational system in B. F. Skinner's Walden Two, and extend the paper to include the second aspect of the comparison, such as an analysis of a typical product of the educational system in

Carolyn Chute's The Beans of Egypt, Maine. Dividing writing topics into segments and completing each portion sequentially has been, according to teachers in both the professional disciplines and the humanities, one of the most successful pedagogical methods presented in writing workshops.

Professional dialogues within their disciplines about teaching writing as a vehicle to content mastery helped bring faculty to a more supportive stance toward the advanced W. As they had several years of experience, teachers at the college were quick to share their expertise with colleagues from other institutions struggling to integrate the teaching of writing and content. By the end of the third year of the new requirement, faculty in biology (Nekvasil, 1991), economics (McElroy, 1990), education (Bryant, Traxler, & Watson, 1993), math (Brown, 1990; Snow, 1990), and nursing (Danford, 1990) had made conference presentations, served as consultants, and written articles describing how incorporating writing into the curriculum was having synergistic effects upon their majors' high-level thinking skills: the ability to understand and critique hypotheses, question assumptions, develop theories, draw inferences, speculate about results.

During the third year of the requirement most departments still frustrated by the advanced W made changes that were both sensible for faculty and helpful for students. Two years of workshop testimonials challenged faculty to enjoy the benefits of teaching--rather than simply assigning--writing in major classes. Several departments also began to study the sequence of courses, including writing topics, in their majors. Structural and procedural reorganizations usually involved managing the length, number and flow of papers. The process of reviewing a complete portfolio at the end of the major was reexamined and modified by a majority of departments.

The single most significant change in writing pedagogy across the disciplines was the introduction of drafts into many syllabus. As faculty built drafts into the development of papers, conversation at writing workshop improved remarkably. Faculty began to discuss such sophisticated questions as whether or not to grade drafts, how many drafts and revisions were enough, how to get students--not teachers-- to do the real work of revising, how to insure that faculty were aided and not abused by the

word processor's capacity to generate clean copies. Faculty spread the word that student progress was gratifying even after the addition of one draft; stacks of revised papers proved to be so much less frustrating that building drafts into syllabuses became almost popular. Faculty who would not incorporate drafts into their courses got little sympathy when they complained about dismal results.

The growing emphasis on drafting and revising within courses gradually paved the way for smoother evaluation procedures. No longer were students expected to revise submissions for their portfolios outside of class; in most departments papers needed to have a teacher's approval by the end of the semester before they could be submitted for the advanced W. The need to receive this endorsement encouraged students to take their written work, and deadlines for assignments, more seriously.

Faculty who became convinced of the success of working through developmental stages within single assignments soon extended this insight to bear on entire courses and departmental requirements. During writing program workshops, teachers illustrated how they planned writing experiences in a developmental sequence, beginning, for example, with a summary or report or description and working through to a personal argument and then to speculation about possible explanations of the data collected. In several departments that later served as models, faculty sat down together, often for days, and honed a sequence of courses and assignments for the entire major (see Traxler & Watson, 1993, for a sequene in eduation). Sophomore and junior psychology majors wrote two or more reflection papers and critiques of journal articles, assigned in several courses. Reflection papers and reviews of single articles were well within the range of beginning majors and good preparation for the research-based position paper or literature review assigned later in the junior and senior years. Such planning distributed the load of teaching writing across a department and insured a manageable schedule of writing assignments for students as they moved through the major.

The sequencing of portfolio evaluation followed naturally from the sequencing of writing topics within a major. This sensible move toward evaluating submission-by-submission helped both students and faculty focus on progress rather than on the failings of the less mature papers. Evaluating papers

submitted early in a major's writing career also alerted faculty to which students had serious writing weaknesses and allowed time for intervention. Students were much happier with this more gradual approach to portfolio evaluation; juniors in psychology, like typical younger siblings, pointed out that the faculty were spending too much time with seniors and their portfolios, neglecting the sophomores and juniors, just when these new majors were ready to focus on writing. These students acknowledged as well that they wanted specific help with their weaknesses and recognition of their progress long before a portfolio was finally approved.

As the number of papers, with their component revisions, seemed to multiply, many faculty began to question when enough was enough. "Too Much Writing as Bad as Too Little," was the topic of a workshop late in the third year of the advanced W. In essence, the faculty had come full circle and were ready to address the mistake made earlier when departments added on the advanced W requirement but failed to subtract anything from already overloaded major curriculums. Faculty were finally asking, what should be cut out of the curriculum to make room for writing, what kinds of writing assignments were more valuable than others, what were appropriate lengths for undergraduate assignments.

A reality principle emerged the third year of the advanced W to replace the perfectionistic tendencies that had characterized faculty's evaluation standards during the first two years of the requirement. Working with drafts in their courses taught faculty how much improvement in students' writing they could realistically expect within a semester, how much progress could be made across the four semesters in most majors. As faculty within departments implemented and revised their requirements, they also revised their sense of the advanced W's goal: to help undergraduates write skillfully within their major disciplines, not to produce publication-quality prose. "This really isn't an advanced writing requirement," various faculty announced, "It's more like a second-level W. We should change the name." Faculty discussions about the appropriate name for the advanced W signaled that the distance between the "ideal" and the "real" student product was shrinking as faculty gained experience teaching writing. Using this new, reality-based standard, faculty began to tease and then to

boast that they were using the "good enough" criteria when evaluating students' papers and portfolios.

Students' solid backing often in that most persuasive form--letters from graduates--of those teachers who offered them instruction in writing, provided invaluable support for the new requirement. The more energetic and capable students endorsed the advanced W from the beginning (certainly for classes who graduated after theirs); by 1992 even weaker students began to take enormous pride in overcoming what many of them later described almost as a disability, their initial terror of writing.

It took the students two years to organize and articulate their responses to the advanced W, but when they spoke at a workshop in late spring of 1991, they were astute and practical. In so many words, members of the student academic council told the faculty that the student body was ready and willing to learn to write; these student leaders asked directly, was the faculty willing to teach them?

Students were ardent in their support of completing assignments step by step; they described the opportunity to draft and revise as a necessary component of any fair writing assignment. Seniors as well as beginning students across campus began to enquire of department chairs and the directors of the writing program why particular teachers did not assign drafts and thus permit them to profit from their mistakes.

Representatives from all majors urged faculty to become more realistic in their goals for the advanced W and more objective in their evaluation criteria. Several students advised faculty to develop a common evaluation instrument to be used across the college. Without exception, they preferred the more objective checksheets first developed by the mathematics and nursing departments. It might well take an objective instrument like a checksheet, students suggested, to help faculty emphasize student progress and de-emphasize their personal peeves and drive toward perfection.

As their confidence in their writing improved, many majors became spokespersons for the second-level writing requirement. The following is from a letter written by a graduate in psychology whose struggles to earn her advanced W were legendary:

Writing is critical to our success as college graduates. I believe that our W program is the best way to guarantee this proficiency. The fact that some papers may receive an "A" in class but are not "W" material demonstrates that our basic in-class work does not meet the writing proficiency standards set up by the school. Without the requirement those students writing inadequate papers would go unnoticed by the faculty. This is of particular concern to me. I am one of those students who would have glided through without achieving proficiency in writing. I believe that the requirement is a guarantee that students continue to be the focus in the educational process.

Conclusion

In the past three years there has been a major shift in the pedagogy of many of the faculty at Saint Mary's College as a result of an upper-level writing requirement. For the faculty the new writing requirement was initially radical, disturbing, difficult to manage. More recently, however, many teachers describe teaching writing as one of the more rewarding aspects of their work. The college's new graduation requirement has led to a faculty development program of unforeseen magnitude. The challenge of helping students learn to write has revitalized older faculty and inspired their younger colleagues. As they develop in skill and confidence, students command faculty's respect as never before.

Monthly writing workshops are widely acknowledged to be the one place on campus where teachers from all disciplines gather and talk seriously about pedagogy. One month recently-tenured faculty from the French department explained how the writing process works with undergraduates learning a new language; the next month a newly appointed cognitive psychologist described why an upper-level writing requirement is essential for developing higher-level thinking skills. Recently appointed and graying faculty leave their research and computers, attend these workshops, and focus their attention on how good writing teaching serves the best interests of students. It is an enormous morale boost to look back on how much faculty across the college have accomplished in developing a whole new area of expertise, to realize virtually daily how much better the students are writing.

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